E 449
.N4

THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

Negroes and Religion.

THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH AT THE SOUTH.

MEMORIAL

To the General Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America.

RIGHT REVEREND AND REVEREND FATHERS AND BRETHREN:—We pray leave to address you on a subject of the profoundest interest to our beloved Church, and particularly to our Southern Dioceses.

The inscrutable decrees of Providence have committed to us the charge in things spiritual, as well as temporal, of the colored biped mammalia, now several millions in number, who are domiciled among us. You know with what pious vigilance and devout fidelity our Zion has cherished and protected those black and yellow lambs of the flock, striving ever to keep them from going astray and to make them daily more abundant in good works. We have indeed labored without ceasing, and not wholly in vain, to make those thus entrusted to our Christian rule good and faithful servants,—sparing no means that could promote this our godly endeavor. To keep them unspotted from an unbelieving world, we have denied ourselves the happiness of sharing with them our stores of profane knowledge, and have made it a felony to teach them to read. That they might not be hindered in running the race that is set before them, we have forbidden them to cumber themselves with worldly goods, and to retain even the fruits of their daily labor, and we have ourselves borne the added burden without complaining. The task of mortifying the flesh and bringing it into subjection, which even the great apostle of the Gentiles was compelled to perform for himself, we have taken off their hands and performed for them. That they might learn not to set their hearts on things of this world, (which passeth away like a shadow,) we have ordained that their domestic ties should be transient, and that they, with or without their wives and children, be kept in free circulation as the basis of trade. And we have labored generally, in the spirit of Christian love, to assimilate them to that order of created beings which is commended in Holy Writ as superior even to the favored people of old, for that "it knoweth its master."

And thus we may say, without boasting, that the Christian graces of humility, long-suffering, and submission to wrong (so difficult of attainment), are nowhere manifested on a larger scale that by this generation, though by nature stiff-necked and untractable. And it is indeed a blessed thought that these biped millions, who might at this day have been herding, with their families around them, in contented degradation,

> "Where Afric's sunny fountains
> Roll down their golden sands,"*

and bowing down before Mumbo-Jumbo, or Baal, or that hideous idol Boo-Ghoo-Boo, now sit where the light of evangelical truth and apos-

* Wm. Gilmore Sims.

43-4 E444 .N4

tolical order shines on those who own them, and where they daily learn that all help in adversity comes from God alone, and not from man.

But to make the system of the Church more self-consistent and harmonious, and to adapt her ministrations to these tender lambs of her flock and to Southern Churchmen, we hold certain changes in her liturgy and discipline to be indispensable.

Our attention to this subject has been specially awakened by the introduction, during your present session at Philadelphia, of a "Canon" absurdly miscalled "of Discipline," so ignorantly and mischievously framed (we would fain believe without actual malignity of purpose), that, under its proposed provisions, a dozen or more mulatto (not to say negro) communicants, if unfortunately eye-witnesses of the commission of a crime by a deacon or presbyter, might actually have been admitted to testify to the fact, and thus to subvert the whole social and political fabric of Virginia or South Carolina. Though this insane or unchristian novelty (which disturbed our peace) was promptly rejected by a unanimous Southern vote, the mere fact that it was put forward is enough to suggest gloomy forebodings, and entitles us to demand of the Church, securities for the future, and such changes in Ritual and Order as shall suit both to Southern institutions. Can it be doubted that communicants not credible under oath require a special Liturgy?

It is to be observed that the *whole* Prayer-book is intended for homogeneous congregations of responsible beings capable of forming domestic ties, and enjoying personal rights. It is, therefore, as a whole, unfit for congregations, where the front pews *own* the free sittings—assemblages composed, in varying proportions, of two classes of Christians, one of which bought the other yesterday and may sell it to-morrow.

But waiving this for the present, certain prominent details require immediate change.

For example: the promise and vow of the marriage service, "I, M., do take thee, N., to be my wedded husband, and to have and to hold * * *till death do us part*," is a mockery when uttered by one of this beloved but subordinated race. We cannot bear thus to put unreal words into the mouths of those so dear to us. It should be amended to read: "till death, or my owner, his executors, administrators, or assignees, do us part." So, too, the demand: "Wilt thou, ———, keep thee only unto him so long as ye both shall live?" and the answer, "I will," should be improved by adding to the words "I will" some form of *protestando* reserving the legal rights of the owner, present or future, of either party; with which the voice of the Church expressed in the present service seems to conflict. This apparent conflict is still more painfully conspicuous where the officiating clergyman is required to say: "Those whom God hath joined together *let no man put asunder*." Volumes of fanaticism and unbelief are latent in these few words. Where the officiating clergyman himself owns either the bride or bridegroom, this declaration might be construed (most unreasonably, but with some plausibility,) as in some sense estopping him from any future exercise of his rights as a Christian and a patriarch, even at considerable pecuniary loss. In every case he is thus made the mouthpiece of a revolutionary doctrine that blasphemes the rights of property and distinctly implies the existence of that Anti-

Christian fiction, a "Higher Law." Such profane utterances may suit the atmosphere of other communities, rank with Fourierisms and Freeloveisms, and every social corruption. But no Church that openly proclaims them can flourish within *our* borders.

Another remedy is submitted which may allow of our leaving this service (so touching and beautiful when used in its proper place) unchanged for the present. Since the Church hath inherent power to loose as well as to bind, your Honorable Body may, in its wisdom, create and establish a fourth subordinate order of the Ministry, specially to exercise the function of loosing, and to administer the Rite of Divorce from time to time with due solemnity to colored couples who have been married in the usual form. This fourth order might be styled that of sub-Deacon, Acolyte, Exorcist, *Hastiarius*, or simply *Auctioneer*. Any person experienced in the duties of that useful calling, and "apt and meet for his smartness and godly conversation to exercise that ministry duly for the edifying of the Church," should be ordained by the Bishop for this particular office, to which other minor duties might judiciously be added. For these, useful hints may lawfully be borrowed from the experience of another and ancient branch of the Church; and we refer to the "Discipline of the Order of Flagellants," (*Disciplina et Regula Ordinis Flagellantium, 4to, Rome*, 1567,) as embodying practical suggestions of much value. A suitable "Form of ordaining Auctioneers" should stand in the Prayer-book immediately after that for ordaining Deacons. A tasteful symbolism would dictate the presentation of a hammer to the candidate by the Bishop, (as the New Testament is delivered to the newly ordained Deacon,) with the solemn words, "Take thou authority to divorce colored persons in the Church at public or private sale, for cash or on credit, and also to knock them down if thou be thereto licensed by the Bishop himself." There should be also an appropriate and very brief service introductory to such sales, concluding with a suitable exhortation to the parties.

The rite of Confirmation, or laying on of hands, also needs regulating. For the avoiding of scandal, persons of the African denomination must be sternly repelled from that ordinance. The peace of Jerusalem may be disturbed if Episcopal hands are still to be brought into physical contact with the heads of these dear children of the Church, except in the way of paternal chastisement. Whatever benefit these black but precious vessels may derive from Confirmation would be far outweighed by the damage the Church would sustain if a chivalric and impulsive public should visit one of her chief ministers with the indignity of tar and feathers for demeaning himself to administer it.

The Litany, too, contains phrases that tend to mischief—the prayers, for instance, to be delivered "from hardness of heart and contempt of Thy Word and commandments," and that "all Christian rulers and magistrates may have grace to execute justice and maintain truth." Properly understood, these are, of course, prayers that we may not fall into the delusion of imagining ourselves bound to mitigate the severity and brutality (falsely so called) of our eminently humane and evangelical "Slave Code," and that the civil authority may be strengthened to maintain and develop it to the end of time. But these supplications have been known to stir up distressing doubts and misgivings in diseased and over sensitive consciences. The prayer for "all who are

desolate and oppressed" is so manifestly liable to perilous misconstruction that its use can no longer be tolerated.

The service for the burial of the dead needs comparatively little change to adapt it to Southern institutions. But in the passage "Forasmuch as it has pleased Almighty God, in his wise providence, to take out of the world the soul of *our deceased brother*," &c., the last quoted three words are unmeaning, offensive to our instincts, and in conflict with the great fundamental ideas of our social system. "This deceased biped," or "this defunct individual black man," or words to that effect, should be substituted. In the solemn offices of religion, aught *unreal* should be studiously avoided.

There are radical defects in the "Prayer for a sick person," and the "Office for the visitation of the sick." Both are inapplicable to the case of sickness occurring among these colored objects of our love. Both assume that the patient, and not the proprietor of the patient, is the person chiefly interested in the patient's recovery. The Church's intercession is for the former alone. She turns coldly away from the sorrow and trial of the owner, without a single prayer that he be spared the loss or enabled to bear it with resignation—though it may reduce him from the estate of a gentleman, by compelling him to labor for his own subsistence! Should this be so?

Fearing to weary you by pointing out specifically all the additions and changes which the Prayer-book requires, we pause here, only hinting at a few further questions too important to be overlooked.

Should not provision be made (according to the ingenious suggestions of a distinguished Northern churchman) in cases where a parish church needs repair or enlargement, for raising the necessary funds by the sale of a sufficient number of colored communicants?

Should not the want (at present so deeply felt) of Collects against Peace, for Dis-unity, and against the inroads of education and intelligence be at once supplied?

Can the present mode of collecting alms at the Offertory be so improved as to enable charitable Christians, anxious to give abundant alms of their substance, but temporarily deficient in the circulating medium, to slip a colored person or persons into the alms-dish, without unseemly noise and confusion?

Should not a commination service, like that of the Anglican Church, or a form of cursing or excommunication like the austere and beautiful composition attributed to Ernulphus, be inserted into the Prayer-book, for the warning and intimidation of black Christians who may be tempted by Satan to think of unlawful emigration toward the ungenial regions of the North?

In view of the vast distinction between ourselves and the class in question, from which we have abstracted all the attributes of humanity which can be effected by human legislation, is it not meet and right that a change be made in our present Communion Service? The Roman Church administers that sacrament to the laity in one kind only. Would it not be consistent with the true spirit of our institutions to administer the same to colored communicants in *neither* kind only?

We submit these grave points for your deliberation, and ask for such prompt action upon them as may preserve the peace of the Church, and vindicate the rights of Southern gentlemen and Christians.

And your memorialists will ever pray, &c.

Charleston, S. C.

54 W

THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS